



Learning the Lessons of the Tsunami – One Month On

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Minimum Number of Beneficiaries reached by Oxfam as of 24th January 2005

India	-	130,000
Sri Lanka	-	100,000
Indonesia	-	75,000

Learning lessons

One month after the tsunami struck on 26 December, for millions of people, it is still a crisis. As well as the tragic toll in life, homes and livelihoods have also been lost. More than a million survivors remain displaced.

The following few pages set out Oxfam's own response, which started on 26 December, in the context of these continuing needs. It covers our work in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, the Maldives and Somalia. It ends with an update on how the international community has – and has not yet – responded with sufficient aid, debt relief and trade reforms, and how Oxfam has tried to contribute to that debate.

In its first Briefing Note on the crisis, on 7 January, Oxfam tried to draw lessons from previous major natural disasters and other crises. It is already possible to draw some from the first month after the tsunami, albeit provisional. Oxfam and many others will surely want to revise these in the coming months, but these 6 lessons are already clear – and should not be ignored.

1. **The survivors need appropriate aid, not any aid.** Some of the aid provided has not been appropriate. The two fundamental things that must be remembered are the need to ask people what they want – and to meet the internationally accepted 'Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards for Disaster Relief'. This is not happening as widely as it should and levels of consultation with beneficiaries are not acceptable.
2. **The aid effort must do more to apply the lessons from previous crises.** The major international humanitarian agencies learnt a large number of lessons from the past, more than anything from the inconsistent humanitarian response to the crises in central Africa in the mid 1990s. As well as the above 'Sphere' technical standards for relief, these include the Code of Conduct for Disaster Relief, setting out acceptable principles; the People in Aid programme on acceptable care of aid workers; and the UN's Guidelines for Internally Displaced People, setting out their rights under international law. All of these are deeply relevant to the post-tsunami response and must be consistently upheld by every agency.

3. **The collapse in international attention does not bode well for sustained aid.** It may take five years – the planning period for Oxfam’s Aceh programme - or more to rebuild the affected areas. But we have already seen a gap between what is promised and delivered. On paper, 93 per cent of the UN’s humanitarian appeal has been funded. In reality, governments have donated only about half the total amount needed. Though more than US\$ 4 billion has been promised for reconstruction, will these promises mean more than massive promises of aid after previous disasters in Iran, Mozambique and Central America?
4. **The need is just as much to find durable solutions for the displaced survivors as for better early warning to mitigate future disasters. These durable solutions must provide an end to violence, and less poverty, as well as rebuilding destroyed infrastructure.** An early warning system may apparently be ready within 18 months. This is vital. But it is easy to ignore the needs of those rebuilding their lives after the tsunami. The great majority of them already lived in extremely difficult circumstances. For example, the 600,000 people displaced in Aceh need more than temporary aid or the temporary camps that are planned. They must be given a genuine choice in the short, medium and long-term. These choices must not just rebuild poverty or Aceh’s violent past. They should provide real options to overcome poverty: what Oxfam calls ‘reconstruction plus’. The Indonesian Government and all warring parties should ensure the end to violence, and commit to negotiating a long-term settlement to Aceh’s conflict. Sri Lanka’s displaced too need their leaders, on all sides, to show the same commitment to ensure that life after the tsunami is not the same as before. Many survivors of the tsunami remain extremely vulnerable to abuse. They need to be protected as well as given immediate aid.
5. **Reconstruction plans should look at the needs of women, men and children differently.** In Sri Lanka, for example, many women who were on beaches or in markets lost their lives. There appear to be large numbers of households in which the father is suddenly a single parent – or the woman a new single mother as men were drowned out fishing. More widely reported, there are also large numbers of orphans and bereaved parents. So far, there has been insufficient attention placed on the specific needs of these and other men, women and children, facing surviving the tsunami in very new circumstances.
6. **Aid is only the first kind of international support that the survivors of disasters need.** To a certain extent this was recognised extraordinarily quickly. The Paris Club of creditors and the European Union have taken welcome initiatives on debt relief and the access to the EU of tsunami-affected countries’ exports. These steps have not yet gone far or wide enough. But they show a very positive awareness that a wide range of international policies should be used to help countries recover after catastrophic crises. This could be followed more widely in future crises – after conflicts as well as natural disasters.

The Tsunami, its impact and Oxfam's response

One Month On...in South India and the Andamans & Nicobar Islands

The tsunami devastated over 700 kilometres of coastland in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and the Union Territory of Pondicherry, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. According to the Government of India, as of 20th January, 2.43 million people have been ‘affected’ by the tsunami in 927 villages. 157,393 houses have been damaged, 10,260 cattle lost, 11,827 hectares of land affected and 64,025 boats damaged. The UN Disaster

Management Team situation report states that “the tsunami has caused extensive damage in the Nicobar Islands which will now need to be more or less rebuilt”.

Oxfam has offices in the North, East, South and West of India and a Regional Centre in New Delhi. Staff in the South India office in Hyderabad immediately organised a team to go to Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, the worst affected state – to assess the damage and how Oxfam could help.

The Indian government moved swiftly into rescue and relief operations on the mainland and in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and also sent assistance to Sri Lanka and to Indonesia. In Tamil Nadu, the worst affected state on the main land, Oxfam staff reported that “the state government is quite responsive to the people’s needs, especially on items like cooked food, grains, and increasingly, other non-food utility items like clothes, bed sheets and cooking fuel.” The government also distributed cash and has issued temporary ration cards. It met, in collaboration with international and local NGOs in many places, interim shelter needs.

Because government rescue and relief efforts were meeting the immediate needs of the vast majority of people affected, the Oxfam team was able to keep monitoring the situation and to plan how to respond to short and medium terms needs and gaps in the existing relief efforts, focusing on our main areas of expertise in emergencies - water and sanitation, public health and food and nutrition – and to start identifying local partner organisations to work with.

Working with local partner organizations in the first month since the tsunami hit, Oxfam has now distributed over 17,000 hygiene kits, provided safe water and latrines for over 20,000 people living in camps, and assisted over 1,000 families with temporary shelter in India. Oxfam has now established operations in some of the worst affected districts in mainland India. In Kanyakumari (S India), Oxfam has joined with other international NGOs and a reputable health institute to train volunteers in psychosocial counseling.

Oxfam sent US\$52,156 as an initial infusion of aid for its partner-led work. Oxfam is supporting these local partner organizations to assist 19,000 people with transporting the injured to hospitals, transporting and assisting in the burial of bodies, establishing community kitchens, providing dry food for cooking in the community kitchens, providing shelter materials such as tents and mats, providing non-food relief items; clothing, sleeping mats and hygiene packs, providing primary health care and medicines, assisting disaster victims to access government relief distribution, liaising with the District Collectorate for accessing any government relief distribution.

Oxfam has identified – and where possible started delivering aid to - groups of people in need of aid who have either not been eligible for compensation because they were not directly hit by the tsunami (like those whose livelihoods depend on the fishing industry – ice packers, net menders etc) or marginalized social groups such as dalits and other isolated communities. Our assessment teams are also monitoring the effectiveness of the government response based on our long experience of issues such as livelihoods and gender – for example we have found that while widows of fishermen have been paid a compensation figure for the death of their husbands they have not received compensation for the loss of the boat – their means of livelihood.

A rapid assessment team was sent to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands where communications were very restricted. Oxfam assessment teams discovered substantial damage to property, long term damage to drinking water sources, including increased salinity, and people suffering from deep trauma. In partnership with the local administration, international NGOs and local NGOs, Oxfam responded to immediate non-food needs of the people in the relief camps by providing hygiene kits including buckets, soap, oil, powder,

under clothes for women, sanitary napkins, footwear, etc. Non-food assistance included provision of sleeping mats, shopping bags and storage boxes and interim shelter, as well as addressing water and sanitation needs both in the camps and at the shelter sites. This included provision of water tanks, bathing cubicles for women and toilets for men and women, besides keeping the area clean of wastewater. A considerable challenge to Oxfam's work in India, apart from the scale and seriousness of the disaster, has been co-ordinating with the hundreds of other agencies and well-wishers who rushed to the area to help.

The Government of India confirmed last week that fishermen were starting to venture back into the sea for fishing despite reports of poor availability of fish in the sea after the tsunami struck. Schools are also beginning to re-open and state government has provided textbooks and note books. The Government approved a package of US\$23.66 million for rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes for tsunami-hit areas (Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry). It will work out a separate package for Andaman and Nicobar Islands after an initial assessment phase.

Oxfam is also now drawing up plans for longer term rehabilitation work. This will focus on supporting people to regain their livelihoods after the devastation of the tsunami and will include repair of boats, provision of fishing nets, reforestation, agricultural support (seeds), and cash-for-work schemes to rebuild village infrastructure. There will also be a focus on improving public health through the installation of hand-pumps, construction of latrines and bathing areas, plus hygiene promotion activities. In addition, activities aimed at improving the ability of each community to respond to any future disasters will also be supported.

One Month On...in the Maldives

The Maldives is made up of over 200 small atolls that stretch 820 kilometres north to south and 120 kilometres east to west. It has a total population of around 270,000. Although the number of deaths was relatively small, because the atolls' highest point is very few meters above sea level, the wave swept over the entire country; 30% of houses have been destroyed beyond repair and many wells were filled with sea water. 50 out of 200 islands were reported to be badly affected. These are spread across an area the size of Britain. Some 15,000 people are displaced, and 30,000 in total in need of clean, fresh drinking water.

Due to the geographical make up of the islands and the damage to infrastructure, data was difficult to collect. Working closely with the government who has set up an effective coordination mechanism, Oxfam continues to focus on its core competences of water and sanitation and health education. One of the most urgent needs was for clean water. The rainy season will be coming to an end shortly and will be followed by a 2-3 month dry season. The main water sources on the island were rain catchments and shallow dug wells. The majority of these are reported to have been polluted or destroyed.

As the Government of the Maldives has the situation under control and as Oxfam did not previously have a presence in the Maldives we will focus mainly on the immediate relief work in the country with a planned duration of two months for our entire programme.

A Virgin Airlines flight carrying 55 tons of bottled water left Heathrow airport on the 6th January for the Maldives. Oxfam would not normally take bottled water to people in emergencies, preferring to source and treat water in bulk in country. But the tsunami went right over the Maldives so a very high proportion of the water has become heavily salinated, especially on outlying islands. In these circumstances, importing water in bottles was appropriate. The flight also carried water equipment including pipes, pumps and tanks to set up a longer-term water system to help with the longer-term solution. A related need is for water storage facilities and Oxfam will help with bladder tanks and pumps for mobile storage and distribution. Oxfam will help by providing three small desalination plants.

The principle industries for the Maldives are tourism and fishing both of which have been badly affected by the Tsunami. Oxfam is working through partners to carry out rehabilitation programming as well as to stimulate local markets and income generation.

One Month On... in Indonesia

Oxfam's own staff arrived in Aceh on Dec 31st, five days after the earthquake and tsunami devastated the coastline of the province. Our local partner organisations had already been distributing emergency supplies. Our immediate focus was on helping people whose homes had been destroyed and who had collected in spontaneous encampments in and around Banda Aceh town (the district of Aceh Besar). The size of these encampments was ranging from 50 to about 5,000 people. Oxfam is still supplying people with clean drinking water, jerry cans, hygiene items, kitchen utensils and sleeping mats, as well as spades and wheelbarrows to help people start to clear the debris of their surroundings. We are also beginning distribution of radios, and are working with a local specialist to make a public health radio programme for the benefit of displaced people and the wider community. In Aceh Besar we are reaching 30,000 people directly, and our public health teams are assessing new sites every day.

The town of Meulaboh (in the district of Aceh Barat) was one of the worst-hit; Oxfam got down by helicopter on 6th January. Since then we have provided water and sanitation to 15,000 people clustered in temporary shelters, dug latrines and wells and installed a water treatment plant. Between Meulaboh and Banda Aceh (the district of Aceh Jaya) the coastline is utterly devastated, and Oxfam has made several helicopter trips to deliver jerry cans, soap, sleeping mats and mosquito nets to 15,000 people displaced into small settlements on the higher ground.

We are now planning to move away from relief distributions towards cash and market interventions, as a means of helping people back to being able to choose and buy their own goods in the local markets.

These places in which people are currently sheltering are very short term solutions – in cars, under plastic sheeting, camped in half-destroyed buildings, self-assembled from debris, or with family and friends whose own resources are limited. Besides being unsafe and unsustainable, such places are difficult to serve effectively with adequate facilities. Over the next few weeks Oxfam expects to complete our immediate relief activities, while increasingly focusing on developing a range of longer term options to assist displaced people more sustainably. People's options are either to move into fewer, larger, temporary settlements being set up by the Government, or to move directly back home and rebuild their lives where possible.

Temporary settlements could provide a stable longer term environment for people while they decide what they want to do next. Oxfam will provide water, sanitation and public health support in all these settlements for those that choose to move to them. Right now we anticipate that some communities may want to stay in transit settlements for up to 2 years. Additionally, we will also offer communities tailored support to facilitate their return home if they choose this option. Based on specific needs, Oxfam will provide practical help with transportation for building materials, help with reconstruction, water & sanitation facilities, and support for restoring people's livelihoods.

During the first year Oxfam plans to reach up to 145,000 people with a range of services according to their needs, although this number could increase if we need to spread our assistance more widely. Longer term, we expect to be working in-depth with communities for up to three years along the West coast, Aceh Besar and the East coast. Increasingly we

will work through local organisations, whose knowledge of the area and the people complements our technical expertise.

One month on... in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's coastline was heavily hit by the tsunami. Oxfam already had an established presence in Sri Lanka with local staff, four field offices in the North and East and strong relationships with local partner organisations enabling Oxfam to respond quickly and effectively to the needs of the survivors.

Flooding two weeks earlier in Sri Lanka meant that Oxfam's field offices were already equipped with relief packs containing soap, buckets, sleeping mats, candles, chlorine for water purification and other essential items. Oxfam staff in Sri Lanka (some of whose own homes and families were hit) gave immediate assistance after the Tsunami in delivering the relief packs to displaced people, helping to rescue survivors, taking the injured to hospital and burying the dead.

Oxfam's offices based in Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Vavuniya and Killinochchi were all involved in distributing hygiene packs and improving water and sanitation. Relief items from within Sri Lanka and from India started reaching affected areas and Oxfam staff distributed temporary latrines, roofing sheets, sleeping mats and food to the temporary 'camps', such as schools and places of worship. An Oxfam aid flight from the UK carrying 11 tons of emergency water equipment arrived in Sri Lanka on the 1 January, and a further two planeloads of specialist equipment have been sent out. Combined with the purchase of local equipment this has provided clean water to tens of thousands of families. The planned purchase of garbage trucks, vacuum tankers and water tankers will help improve the water and sanitation situation further.

Working with local Sri Lankan partner organisations like Kinniya Vision, Oxfam is providing clean water, toilets and basic essentials such as blankets, sleeping mats, buckets, and matches for people who have lost everything. In Ampara, Oxfam has set up women's committees and established private areas for women in the relief camps as well as setting up two pre-schools and are sponsoring health promotion sessions for pregnant women along side 'Save the Children'. Other aspects of our work include playing a coordination/information role and acting as a distribution point in some areas, rehabilitating the environment and working on disaster management. We are also working with BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee - an organization with extensive experience in working in flood situations and on livelihoods).

Relief in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) controlled areas has been well organised and the Government's response – mainly focused in the south – has been effective too. The main challenge has been co-ordination of the large numbers of agencies operating in the area. Oxfam is responding to the challenge with plans to focus its work in the remotest areas, where other agencies are not operating.

Many people have lost not only their possessions, homes and loved ones, but also their source of income, for example fishing men have no boats to fish in, paddy fields are ruined due to the salt. Income is crucial to enable people to rebuild their lives following the disaster. Oxfam is developing a livelihoods programme to enable people to earn a living again.

Oxfam is currently designing its longer-term programs for the tsunami-affected regions of Sri Lanka. We aim to measurably improve the food and income security, public health and the water and sanitation needs of up to 40,000 affected families by 2007. Oxfam aims to ensure that at least 20,000 of the worst affected families will have access to clean water, and waste disposal services. We will focus on women's and child protection issues in the planning and implementation of these facilities. Oxfam will implement a health education program to facilitate better knowledge and means to achieve good levels of health and hygiene as a way of diminishing the risk of disease.

Oxfam is specifically targeting the fishing community with programs offering cash for work and boat rehabilitation schemes. Oxfam will also distribute new boats and other assets people need to make a living to targeted households who are in greatest need.

One Month On...in Somalia

By December 31st an inter-agency assessment had reached some of the affected areas such as Hafun and started to provide initial elements of humanitarian assistance. They faced many problems with access due to lack of infrastructure but information was coming in from organisations operating on the ground. An aerial assessment was carried out to get the full overview along the 700 km of coastline.

Ocean Training Programme – an Oxfam partner organisation working with fishing communities in the affected area - was part of the assessment team and began organising support to 10,000 people in Hafun, Fo'aar, Garan and Ga'ard. Oxfam contributed towards the organisation's distribution of relief items and the repair of water systems.

A second partner, the Galkayo Education Centre for Peace and Development, working from Galkayo, participated in the UN Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) assessment mission. With US\$10,000 from Oxfam they distributed non food relief items to Kulub and Ilfoocshe, villages in the neighbourhood of Garacad.

The Political Environment

International response

Governments from around the world responded to the tsunami with unprecedented promises of aid. In almost every case, this response followed, not led, enormous demonstrations of public compassion and generosity.

Within 24 hours of the tsunami, Oxfam's own work on the ground, and its support for its local partner organisations, was complemented by its work pressing governments and others to do all that they could. It produced two major Briefing Notes on 7 and 14 January, as well as a range of other materials to communicate with its supporters and donors, politicians and officials, and the media.

Donor governments' pledges cover most of the US\$ 977 million called for by the UN Secretary General on 6 January for urgent humanitarian aid. US\$ 912 million has been either officially pledged or is available in other ways for the Flash Appeal. Japan, the UK, Norway, Germany, and the European Commission promised to contribute more than US\$ 50 million each. So far, however, only around half of the funds needed have been contributed to the UN.

As well as pressing for urgent pledges and contributions, Oxfam responded immediately to President Bush's suggestion on 29 December that a 'core group' of governments – initially the US, Japan, Australia and India – should lead the international response. Oxfam pressed them to support, not duplicate, the UN's role in coordinating international aid, led by the

UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator, Jan Egeland. On 6 January, the US plan was diplomatically dropped, at the emergency meeting of world leaders in Jakarta.

Debt relief

On 12 January, the Paris Club of creditors offered to freeze debt repayments from tsunami-affected countries. Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Seychelles indicated that they would take advantage of this offer.

But the Club failed to go beyond this. It should still commission an urgent assessment to determine what level of debt repayments is sustainable, after the tsunami, for each of the indebted countries. The results should swiftly lead to the cancellation of debts above that sustainable level, so long as the proceeds are spent on reconstruction and to reduce poverty, and provided that the decision and the process are transparent to both creditors and the people of the countries concerned. Creditors should *not* insist, as they usually do, on conditions intended to advance economic liberalisation, such as removing measures to protect national rice production.

Trade barriers

On 1 January, the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) came to an end. This quota system gave textiles and clothing from Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Indonesia better access to EU and US markets than that granted to exports from China and India. Six days after the tsunami, these countries lost that support. Some companies, however, have changed their plans as a result of the tsunami. They appear to have postponed plans to relocate from affected countries, as these countries became less attractive sources of textiles and clothing as the MFA came to an end.

On 21 January, the European Union agreed to support some other trade reforms that would benefit tsunami-affected countries. Following a meeting of its 133 Committee, EU members gave their support to a Commission proposal to fast-track reform of the EU's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), which will improve access to EU markets for imports from tsunami-affected countries and others. Oxfam welcomed this while pressing the EU to guarantee that larger developing countries, whose exports constitute more than 1 per cent of GSP-covered trade, are not excluded from the change announced. The EU should confirm that developing countries would not lose preferences for particular sectors after only a short time.

Collated by Sabita Banerji Jan 25th 2005